

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5491

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 0098

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PFOR, LT, ZA

SUBJECT: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS STUDY - LESOTHO

REF: (A) STATE 20621, (B) 75 MASERU 1123, (C) 75 MASERU 507,
(D) 75 MASERU 315, (E) 74 MASERU 1420

1. REGRET POST UNABLE RESPOND BY FEB 2 DEADLINE BECAUSE OF DELAY IN
RECEIPT REF A AND CFR NO. 3.

2. SUMMARY: LESOTHO'S ARMS REQUIREMENTS ARE NOT VERY SIGNIFICANT
IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE. A NUMBER OF FACTORS ALREADY
RESTRAIN LESOTHO'S ARMS IMPORTS AND PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE TO INHIBIT
ANY SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN FLOW OF ARMS TO LESOTHO. GOL'S FIRST
CONCERN WITH REGARD TO ARMS IS TO HAVE SUFFICIENTLY-EQUIPPED FORCE
TO INSURE INTERNAL SECURITY; THIS IS CONSIDERED AN ABSOLUTE REQUIRE-
MENT BY GOL AND THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT U.S. WOULD BE IN
POSITION TO OFFER ANY INCENTIVE TO DETER GOL FROM SEEKING ARMS TO
MEET THIS REQUIREMENT. U.S. MIGHT BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE SOME OF
LESOTHO'S SUPPLIERS TO RESTRICT ARMS SALES, BUT LESOTHO WOULD BE
SENSITIVE TO ANY SUCH EFFORT. THIS SENSITIVITY MIGHT BE ASSUAGED IF
REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT WERE TIED TO CONCENTRATION ON INCREASED CON-
TRIBUTIONS TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

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3. LESOTHO SEES ITS REQUIREMENTS FOR ARMS PRIMARILY IN TERMS OF

MAINTAINING INTERNAL SECURITY, ESPECIALLY PREVENTING OR CONTAINING ANY EFFORT BY THE OPPOSITION TO TAKE POWER BY FORCE. LESOTHO HAS NO ARMY; RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SECURITY IS ASSIGNED TO POLICE MOBILE UNIT (PMU), THE 500-MAN PARA-MILITARY UNIT OF LESOTHO POLICE. GOL CONSIDERS IT ESSENTIAL TO KEEP PMU ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED TO PERFORM ITS MISSION IN FACE OF WHAT IT BELIEVES IS A REAL THREAT. PRIME MINISTER CONSIDERS PMU TO BE INADEQUATELY SUPPLIED AT PRESENT AND IS ACTIVELY ENGAGED, WITH SOME SUCCESS, IN EFFORT TO DEVELOP NEW SOURCES OF ARMS. EMBASSY SEES LITTLE

LIKELIHOOD THAT U.S. IS IN POSITION TO OFFER ANY INCENTIVES, SUCH AS POLITICAL OR SECURITY GUARANTEES, WHICH WOULD DETER LESOTHO FROM PURSUING WHAT IT CONSIDERS AN ABSOLUTE INTERNAL REQUIREMENT.

4. LESOTHO'S PERCEIVED ARMS NEEDS ARE RELATIVELY MODEST. SECURITY FORCE IS PRESENTLY ARMED PRIMARILY WITH BRITISH LIGHT ARMS. IT HAS BEGUN TO RECEIVE SOME WEAPONS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM IRAN (REF B), AND WE BELIEVE IT IS STILL SEEKING ADDITIONAL ARMS AND EQUIPMENT, SUCH AS HELICOPTERS, SPOTTER AIRCRAFT, ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS, HEAVY MORTARS AND MACHINE GUNS, AND ADDITIONAL LIGHT WEAPONS FROM UGANDA AND LIBYA (REFS D AND E) FOR INTERNAL SECURITY PURPOSES. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT LESOTHO WILL SOON SEEK TO ACQUIRE MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS OR SUBSTANTIALLY LARGER QUANTITIES OF CONVENTIONAL LIGHT WEAPONS THAN IT CALCULATES ARE SUFFICIENT FOR INTERNAL

SECURITY NEEDS.

5. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RESTRAINTS ON ANY SIGNIFICANT ARMS ACQUISITIONS BY GOL BEYOND ITS IMMEDIATE INTERNAL SECURITY NEEDS. IT SEES NO PRESENT NEED, OR POSSIBILITY, OF ESTABLISHING AN INTERNAL DEFENSE FORCE. (IN LONGER RUN, HOWEVER, IF THREATS OF OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE ARISE IN SOUTH AFRICA, IT MIGHT PERCEIVE NEED FOR TIGHTER BORDER SECURITY TO PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM OVER-FLOWING INTO LESOTHO.) SEVERE BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS MILITATE AGAINST SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN EXPENDITURES FOR ARMS, AND LESOTHO IS NOT HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE TO SUPPLIERS WHICH WOULD FURNISH ARMS ON GRANT OR CONCESSIONARY BASIS. LESOTHO DOES NOT HAVE BASING, MAINTENANCE, OR TRANSPORT FACILITIES FOR MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS, SUCH AS TANKS OR JET AIRCRAFT, AND DOES NOT HAVE, NOR IS IT LIKELY TO HAVE IN NEAR FUTURE, POOL OF TRAINED MANPOWER FROM WHICH TO DRAW PERSONNEL TO OPERATE SUCH

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WEAPONS. IMPORTANT POLITICAL RESTRAINT IS NEGATIVE STANCE SOUTH AFRICA WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY TAKE IN FACE OF ANY BUILDUP OF LESOTHO'S EXTERNAL MILITARY CAPABILITIES.

6. U.S. MIGHT BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE SOME ARMS SUPPLIERS, PERHAPS IRAN, TO RESTRICT MILITARY SUPPLIES TO LESOTHO. ANY SUCH OVERT EFFORT, HOWEVER, WOULD BE SEEN BY GOL AS U.S. INTERFERENCE IN LESOTHO'S LEGITIMATE SECURITY INTERESTS. ON REGIONAL LEVEL, GOL WOULD PROBABLY ACCEPT

GENERAL POLICY OF INTERNATIONAL RESTRAINT ON ARMS BUILDUPS IN AFRICA IF IT WERE PART OF POLICY OF DIRECTING MORE RESOURCES TOWARD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IT WOULD FIND IDEA OF ARMS RESTRAINT IN AFRICA MORE ACCEPTABLE IF IT WERE CONVINCED U.S. AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES WERE DOING ALL WITHIN THEIR POWER TO BRING ABOUT PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO INJUSTICE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. IT WOULD BE DISTURBED IF IT PERCEIVED ARMS RESTRAINT POLICY AS MEANS OF PRESERVING STATUS QUO.

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